

Nathelesse, ther can noon answey,  
How high that ever his heed he shere  
With rasour whetted never so kene,  
That Gyle in braunches cut thriftene;  
Ther can no wight distyncte it so,  
That he dar sey a word therto.

**B**UT what herberwe that ever I take,  
Or what semblant that ever I make,  
I mene but gyle, and folowe that;  
For right no mo than Gibbe our cat  
fro myce and rattes went his wyle,  
Ne entende I not but to begyle;  
Ne no wight may, by my clothing,  
Wite with what folk is my dwelling;  
Ne by my wordis yet, pardee,  
So softe and so plesaunt they be.  
Behold the dedis that I do;  
But thou be blind, thou oughtest so;  
for, varie hir wordis fro hir dede,  
They thenke on gyle, withouten drede,  
What maner clothing that they were,  
Or what estat that ever they bere,  
Lered or lewd, lord or lady,  
Knight, squier, burgeis, or bayly.

**R**IGHT thus whyl fals Semblant  
sermoneth,  
Eftsones Love him aresoneth,  
And brak his tale in the speking  
As though he had him told lesing;  
And seide: What, devel, is that I here?

What folk hast thou us nempned here?  
May men finde religioun  
In worldly habitacioun?  
**fals Semblant.**

**N**E, sir; it foloweth not that they  
Shulde lede a wikked lyf, parfey,  
Ne not therfore her soules lese,  
That hem to worldly clothes chese;  
for, certis, it were gret pitee.  
Men may in seculer clothes see  
florisschen holy religioun.  
ful many a seynt in feeld and toun,  
With many a virgin glorious,  
Devout, and ful religious,  
Had deyed, that comun clothe ay beren,  
Yit seyntes nevertheles they weren.  
I coude reken you many a ten;  
Ye, wel nigh alle these holy wimmen,  
That men in chirchis herie and seke,  
Bothe maydens, and these wyves eke,  
That baren many a fair child here,  
Wered alwey clothis seculere,  
And in the same dyden they,  
That seyntes weren, and been alwey.  
The eleven thousand maydens dere,  
That beren in heven hir ciervis clere,  
Of which men rede in chirche, and singe,  
Wered take in seculer clothing,  
Whan they resseyved martirdom,  
And wonnen heven unto her boom.  
Good herte makith the gode thought;  
The clothing yeveth ne reveth nought.  
The gode thought and the worching,

That maketh religioun flowring,  
Ther lyth the good religioun  
Aftir the right entenciou.

**W**HOSO toke a wethers skin,  
And wrapped a gredy wolf therin,  
for he shulde go with lambis whyte,  
Wenest thou not he wolde hem byte?  
Yis! nevertheles, as he were wood,  
He wolde hem wery, and drinke the blood;  
And wel the rather hem disceyve,  
for, sith they coude not perceyve  
his treget and his crueltee,  
They wolde him folowe, al wolde he flee.

**I**f ther be wolves of sich hewe  
Amonges these apostlis newe,  
Thou, holy chirche, thou mayst be wayled!  
Sith that thy citee is assayled  
Thourgh knightis of thyn owne table,  
God wot thy lordship is doutable!  
If they enforce hem it to winne,  
That shulde defende it fro withinne,  
Who might defence ayens hem make?  
Withouten stroke it mot be take  
Of trepet or mangonel;  
Without displaying of pensel,  
And if God nil don it socour,  
But lat hem renne in this colour,  
Thou moost thyn heestis laten be.  
Than is ther nought, but yelde thee,  
Or yeve hem tribute, douteles,  
And holde it of hem to have pees:  
But gretter harm bityde thee,  
That they al maister of it be.  
Wel conne they scorne thee withal;  
By day stuffen they the wal,  
And al the night they mynen there.  
Nay, thou most planten elleswhere  
Thyn impes, if thou wolt fruyt have;  
Abyd not there thyself to save.

**B**UT now pees! here I turne ageyn;  
I wol no more of this thing seyn,  
If I may passen me herby;  
I mighte maken you wery.  
But I wol heten you alway  
To helpe your freendis what I may,  
So they wollen my company;  
for they be shent al outerly  
But if so falle, that I be  
Oft with hem, and they with me.  
And eek my lemman mot they serve,  
Or they shul not my love deserve.  
forsothe, I am a fals traitour;  
God jugged me for a theef trichour;  
forsworn I am, but wel nygh non  
Wlot of my gyle, til it be don.

**T**HOURGH me hath many oon deth res-  
seyved,  
That my treget never aperceyved;  
And yit resseyveth, and shal resseyve,  
That my falsnesse never aperceyve:  
But whoso doth, if he wys be,  
him is right good be war of me.  
But so sligh is the deceyving

That to hard is the aperceyving.  
for Protheus, that coude him chaunge  
In every shap, boomy and straunge,  
Coude never sich gyle ne tresoun  
As I: for I com never in toun  
Theras I mighte knowen be,  
Thourgh men me bothe might here and see.

**W**el I can my clothis chaunge,  
Take oon, and make another straunge.  
Now am I knight, now chasteleyn;  
Now prelat, and now chapeleyn;  
Now prelat, now clerk, and now forstere;  
Now am I maister, now scolere;  
Now monk, now chanoun, now baily;  
Whatever mister man am I.  
Now am I prince, now am I page,  
And can by herte every langage.  
Somytyme am I hoor and old;  
Now am I yong, and stout, and bold;  
Now am I Robert, now Robyn;  
Now frere Menour, now Jacobyn;  
And with me folweth my loveby,  
To don me solas and company,  
That hight dame Abstinence: Streyned,  
In many a queynt array yfeyned.  
Right as it cometh to hir lyking,  
I fulfillle al hir desiring.  
Somytyme a wommans cloth take I;  
Now am I mayde, now lady.  
Somytyme I am religious;  
Now lyk an anker in an hous.  
Somytyme am I prioressse,  
And now a nonne, and now abbessse;  
And go thurgh alle regiouns,  
Seking alle religious.  
But to what ordre that I am sworn,  
I lete the strawe, and take the corn;  
To blynde folk ther I enhabite,  
I are no more but hir abite.

**W**HAT wol ye more? in every wyse,  
Right as me list, I me disgyse.  
Wel can I bere me under weed;  
Unlyk is my word to my deed.  
Thus make I in my trappis falle,  
Thurgh my pryvileges, alle  
That ben in Cristendom alyve.  
I may assoile, and I may shryve,  
That no prelat may lette me,  
Al folk, wherever they founde be:  
I moot no prelat may don so,  
But if the pope be, and no mo,  
That made thilk establisshing.

**W**ell is not this a propre thing?  
But, were my sleightis aperceyved,  
Ne shulde I more been receyved  
As I was wont; and wostow why?  
for I dide hem a tregetry;  
But therof yeve I lifel tale,  
I have the silver and the male;  
So have I preched and eek shriven,  
So have I take, so have me yiven,  
Thurgh hir foly, husbond and wyf,  
That I lede right a joly lyf,

Thurgh simplesse of the prelacye;  
They know not al my tregetrye.

**B**UT for as moche as man and wyf  
Shuld shewe hir paroches prest hir lyf  
Ones a yeer, as seith the book,  
Er any wight his housel took,  
Than have I pryvilegis large,  
That may of moche thing discharge;  
for he may seye right thus, pardee:  
Sir Dreest, in shrift I telle it thee,  
That he, to whom that I am shriven,  
Hath me assoiled, and me yiven  
Penaunce soothly, for my sinne,  
Which that I fond me gilty inne;  
Ne I ne have never entenciou  
To make double confessioun,  
Ne herce eft my shrift to thee;  
O shrift is right ynough to me.  
This oughte thee suffyce wel,  
Ne be not rebel never a del;  
for certis, though thou haddest it sworn,  
I wot no prest ne prelat born  
That may to shrift eft me constreine.  
And if they don, I wol me pleyne;  
for I wot where to pleyne wel.  
Thou shalt not streyne me a del,  
Ne enforce me, ne yit me trouble,  
To make my confessioun double.  
Ne I have none affecciou  
To have double absolucioun.  
The firste is right ynough to me;  
This latter assoiling quyte I thee.  
I am unbounde; what mayst thou finde  
More of my sinnes me to unbinde?  
for he, that might hath in his bond,  
Of alle my sinnes me unbond.  
And if thou wolt me thus constreine,  
That me mot nedis on thee pleyne,  
There shal no jugge imperial,  
Ne bisshop, ne official,  
Don jugement on me; for I  
Shal gon and pleyne me openly  
Unto my shrift/fadir newe,  
That hight not frere Wolf untrewel  
And he shal chevisse him for me,  
for I trowe he can hampre thee.  
But, lord! he wolde be wrooth withalle,  
If men him wolde frere Wolf calle!  
for he wolde have no pacience,  
But don al cruel vengeaunce!  
He wolde his might don at the leest,  
Ne nothing spare for goddis heest.  
And, God so wis be my socour,  
But thou yeve me my Saviour  
At Ester, whan it lyketh me,  
Withoute presing more on thee,  
I wol forth, and to him goon,  
And he shal housel me anoon,  
for I am out of thy grucching;  
I kepe not dele with thee nothing.  
Thus may he shryve him, that forsaketh  
his paroches prest, and to me taketh.  
And if the prest wol him refuse,